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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SMIG](#) [SNAR](#) [BF](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: HAITIAN AMBASSADOR OPPOSES SLOOP BAN, SEEKS TO
ORGANIZE HAITIANS

REF: A. NASSAU 398
[1](#)B. NASSAU 191

Classified By: Charge for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Haitian Ambassador told Charge he seeks to better organize the Haitian-Bahamian community in order to more effectively lobby the GCOB on issues of concern. He also expressed opposition to a new GCOB ban on wooden-hulled commercial sailing sloops citing its negative economic effects. Post and other USG actors have called for legislation, still in the works, effectively banning such vessels as essentially unregulated and hazardous to illegal migrants. Organized opposition to the ban and increased advocacy by Haitian-Bahamians on Haitian issues could provoke a backlash against Haitians by the Bahamian government and public. END SUMMARY.

DECRIES SLOOP BAN AS BAD ECONOMICS, BUT ADMITS DANGERS

[1](#)2. (C) The longtime Ambassador of Haiti in The Bahamas, Louis Joseph, told Charge of his concerns over recent GCOB ban on wooden-hulled commercial sailing sloops, most of which originate from northern Haiti. Haitian wooden trading sloops normally have their cargoes inspected at Matthew Town, Great Inagua before proceeding north. From there they conduct small-scale trade in foodstuffs, charcoal, and other goods between Haiti and Haitian communities throughout the Bahamian islands. In recent weeks the Royal Bahamas Defense Force has not been allowing the sloops to proceed north from Great Inagua. It remains unclear precisely when the new ban on trading sloops was instituted and on what basis. Since August, the sailboats have disappeared from Nassau's western harbor.

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador Joseph opposed the move due to its negative economic effects both in Haiti and in the Haitian community throughout The Bahamas. He allowed that the vessels were basically unregulated under current law and posed serious hazards to migrants who use them for illegal passage through Bahamian waters, occasionally resulting in serious loss of life. The Ambassador, however, stated that there was no proof that such vessels were implicated in drug or arms smuggling, and that their role in human smuggling was much smaller than that of air routes. He stated that these vessels were essential for traditional trade between Haiti and The Bahamas and that the only long-term solution for the problem of illegal immigration was to assist the economic development of Haiti, encouraging people to stay, rather than risk their lives at sea to emigrate north. COMMENT: While trading sloops may indeed have little spare capacity to smuggle people, similar vessels overloaded with illegal migrants are commonly spotted off the shores of New Providence and other islands, belying the Ambassador's dismissal of their role in human smuggling compared to illegal arrivals by air. While South Americans might fly to Nassau before embarking on fast-boat excursions to Florida, Haitian migrants come by sea. END COMMENT.

NO GCOB CONSULTATIONS ON BAN, DESPITE USG CALLS FOR ACTION

14. (C) Ambassador Joseph was particularly unhappy that the GCOB did not consult or inform the Haitian Embassy in advance about the ban. This left the impression in the Haitian community, he said, that the Haitian Embassy was involved in the policy and complicated his already sensitive relations with members of the community. PolChief noted USG concerns over regulation and safety of these vessels, and asked the Ambassador to stress in his outreach to the Haitian community that there was no change in U.S. immigration policy toward the Caribbean.

15. (C) GCOB officials did not consult or inform Post on the recent change in policy concerning the sloops either, despite regular USG calls for legislation to regulate, and effectively ban, such vessels in the past (ref A, B). Immigration officials first informed EmbOffs about the new policy of not allowing sailing freighters to proceed beyond Great Inagua September 19, explaining that no such sloops had reached Nassau in three weeks. Subsequent contacts with port and immigration officials confirmed the ban, which was reportedly implemented under existing immigration law. No formal order or document indicating a start-date for the new policy was produced, and new legislation remains in the works. COMMENT: The move has all the appearance of an ad hoc policy, possibly associated with changes in the immigration portfolio since a government reshuffle in July. The new Minister of Immigration, who now reports to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, told the Charge September 25 only that the Prime Minister had

given him "some latitude" upon his assumption of duty. END COMMENT.

CALL FOR HAITIAN GROUPS TO UNITE AND LOBBY

16. (C) The Haitian Ambassador told the Charge that he also seeks to better organize the Haitian-Bahamian community in order to more effectively lobby the GCOB on issues of concern. Joseph pointed to problems with fair and timely processing of citizenship and residency claims, immigration enforcement efforts targeting illegal Haitians, and mistreatment by unscrupulous employers who take advantage of weaknesses in Bahamian immigration law to exploit workers, legal or otherwise. The Ambassador noted that while the Ingraham government was less engaged bilaterally with Haiti, its policies at home were more amenable to Haitians living here. He contrasted this with the situation under the previous, PLP administration, when the Foreign Minister engaged quickly and publicly with the Haitian government upon taking office, while the Ministry of Immigration cracked down on illegals and increased anti-immigrant rhetoric. The Ambassador speculated that this policy backfired in the May 2007 elections, leading Haitian-Bahamian voters to turn the tide against the incumbent PLP in several Nassau constituencies and help ensure an FNM win.

17. (C) Meanwhile, The Bahamas, Prime Minister Ingraham called in New York at the UNGA for increased international investment in economic development in Haiti, and announced that the GCOB will provide more disaster relief and even suspend repatriations of illegal immigrants to Haiti. The GCOB, and the Bahamian public, are already primed for increased migration from Haiti and the associated social and economic problems, at a time of heightened domestic economic uncertainty due to the financial problems in the U.S.

COMMENT

18. (C) With the Haitian population in The Bahamas reliably estimated to be between 25 and 35 thousand (8-11%), tensions could rise significantly should the Haitians openly organize and advocate for Haitian issues. The sizable Haitian

community is generally subjected to societal prejudice and a degree of economic exploitation. The recent change in policy toward wooden sloops may be the catalyst that unites this already disenfranchised community. The Haitian Ambassador,s plan to increase advocacy comes at a particularly sensitive time, given the Bahamas, fear of a mass exodus north following the recent series of storms and ongoing economic desperation, and risks antagonizing a Bahamian government and public already fearful of a mass migration from Haiti.

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